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ABSTRACT

School reform efforts may prove ephemeral without changes in the teaching occupation. The field lacks professional discretion, career advancement, and adequate compensation. As a result, the profession fails to attract enough educationally qualified people. Experiments in changing teacher work roles are being done to try and fill this shortage. These efforts fall into three types: (1) career ladder programs; (2) shared decision-making; and (3) altered school organizational structures. The first category divides teachers into four types: novice, classroom, enhanced classroom, and expert. With each "rung" comes increased responsibility and pay. Shared decision-making includes site-based management, in which significant educational decisions are made by teams of teachers and administrators, and trust agreements that enable teachers to help develop written management decisions. The third type consists of instructional team teaching, charter schools (with "charters" allowing them to explore educational innovations), and small group models. Some schools incorporate multiple reforms as there is no one correct strategy. Targeting reforms at problem areas is of critical importance as well as considering the amount of responsibility teachers are willing to accept, the principal's role, and labor reconfigurations. Bureaucratic inertia can be a significant barrier; however, legislative action can serve as a catalyst for change and break many obstacles. (EJS)

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Redefining Teacher Work Roles: Prospects and Possibilities

Julia E. Koppich, Patricia Brown and Mary Amsler

Introduction

The United States is in the seventh year of a nationwide education reform movement. This reform movement centers around the need to increase educational productivity, enhance human capital, and prepare workers who, in the twenty-first century, will be required to "think for a living." This round of reform, christened the "excellence movement," began in 1983 with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* and its now-famous warning that a "rising tide of mediocrity" threatened to engulf the nation's schools.

Beginning in 1986, another series of reports on the state of American education emerged. Significantly, each of these "second wave" reports — among them Carnegie's *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century;* the National Governors Association's *Time for Results;* and the Holmes Group's *Tomorrow's Teachers* — argued that **without substantial changes in the teaching occupation, other education reform efforts could well prove ephemeral.**

Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development serves the four-state region of Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah, working with educators at all levels to plan and carry out school improvements. Part of our mission is to help state department staff, district superintendents, school principals, and classroom teachers keep abreast of the best current thinking and practice.

Many states and districts responded to the challenge by experimenting with career ladder systems, peer evaluation, site-based management with teacher councils, and a variety of other programs designed to give teachers more discretion over their work and opportunities to broaden their skills without leaving the classroom.

This *Policy Brief* will examine the most prominent and interesting of these experiments. We will discuss the problems in the teaching profession to which these reforms are addressed, analyze several different models for changing the teaching profession, and examine the implications these changes have for other school policies and practices.

The Nature of Teaching

Public opinion polls show that a vast majority of teachers are dissatisfied with their jobs. Approximately 50 percent of those entering the teaching profession leave within five years, and new teachers tend to come from the lower end of the academic pool. During the 1980s, districts throughout the country have been unable to attract sufficient numbers of qualified teachers. The specific complaints that teachers and analysts raise are many:

- **Isolation.** A teacher's professional universe is largely confined to an individual classroom, contributing to an atmosphere in which autonomy often becomes synonymous with isolation.
- **Support.** Neither elementary nor secondary teachers have clerical assistance. Required paperwork must be accomplished outside the regular workday. Professional development typically is sandwiched in on teachers' own time.
- **Discretion and Control.** Decisions, including who teaches what courses and at what times, what curriculum materials are used, and the content, timing, and presentation of teachers' professional development activities continue to be made almost exclusively by administrators and school board members. A 1985 survey of California teachers, for example, found that the area in which teachers had the broadest professional discretion was in the arrangement of the furniture in their classrooms (Koppich, Gerritz, & Guthrie, 1986).
- **Career Advancement.** Teaching is an unstaged career (Lortie, 1975) in which an individual has virtually the same professional responsibilities on the first day of the first year on the job as on the last day of the thirtieth year. Out of the classroom and into administration continues to be the path to professional promotion in education.
- **Compensation and Status.** Despite significant paper gains in teacher compensation levels, real wages for teachers have not

increased significantly during the past 10 years. The status of teachers in public opinion polls is well below other public service jobs. Teachers do not feel that their hard work and effort is adequately rewarded either symbolically or in cash.

The Quality-Quantity Dilemma

This critique of teaching comes at a time when there is a shortage of teachers nationwide and the academic qualifications of people entering the profession are not markedly improving. For much of this nation's history, teaching was one of the few professional refuges for women and minorities. Times have changed. The attractiveness of teaching as a career option has dwindled. Able individuals continue to choose a teaching career, but the profession also tends to draw a significant number of recruits from the bottom group of SAT scorers (Darling-Hammond, 1984).

Some policymakers and analysts fear that raising standards for teachers through admissions requirements and more rigorous evaluation will create an even bigger gap between the number of teachers needed to staff classrooms and the number of qualified candidates.

Advocates of teacher empowerment and the professionalization of teaching, however, envision a quite different set of outcomes. They view changes in teacher work roles as the solution to the quality-quantity dilemma. They argue that teacher empowerment and professionalization will increase the commitment and performance of existing teachers while making the profession more attractive to better qualified candidates.

Experiments in Changing Teacher Work Roles

In response to these calls for teacher professionalization and teacher empowerment, current problems with the job of teaching, and the need for both more and better trained teachers, many states and districts have created programs that change the role of teachers.

The major efforts to change work roles or redefine the teaching profession fall into three loose categories of activities: 1) career ladder programs, 2) shared decision making, and 3) altering the organizational structure of schools. Each of these efforts gives priority to different aspects of the complexity of teaching and combines perceived solutions in unique ways.

Career Ladder Programs

Career ladder programs provide teachers with enhanced professional responsibilities in exchange for increased pay. These programs are characterized by efforts to differentiate teaching jobs by experience and level of responsibility. Compensation would vary by level. Typically, career ladders divide teachers into three or four types: 1) novice or beginning teachers who are given significant support and training opportunities from more experienced teachers; 2) classroom teachers; 3) classroom teachers with enhanced professional responsibilities (such as curriculum development, program development, or staff development); and 4) expert teachers whose primary responsibilities are teacher supervision, evaluation, and training.

Career ladder programs enhance teachers' responsibilities as teachers become more experienced and increase compensation for some teachers beyond what is usually available for classroom teachers. Career ladders also can enhance both teacher-to-teacher contact and sharing of expertise within a school or district , as well as increase the level of support that teachers feel, thus decreasing isolation as well as enhancing the probability of improved performance. The road to a successful career ladder system, however, is rocky. Many teachers are threatened by differentiating teacher roles. Clearly, part of the career ladder is a hierarchy of teachers some of whom are perceived as being better than others and who are paid more.

One program which has received national visibility is the Utah Career Ladder System. It is a statewide effort with all 40 districts within the state involved in the development of a five-component program which includes an extended contract year, performance bonuses, and ladders with different tasks associated with the different rungs of a five-to-six step ladder.

Within the FWL region, Arizona has recently doubled the number of districts involved in its Career Ladder Pilot Programs from 14 districts to 28. Individual districts have developed plans tailored to the specific needs of their teachers. This pilot program is receiving a lot of attention because the state is hoping to gather specific data on the relationship between student achievement and career ladders.

Mentor teaching programs provide opportunities for experienced teachers to make their professional expertise available to their colleagues. Typically, these programs give teachers external responsibilities in addition to their classroom responsibilities for designated periods of time. These responsibilities might include supporting beginning teachers, working with experienced teachers on particular skills, developing curriculum, and conducting general staff development activities, and supervision. For the time that one is a mentor teacher, additional compensation is usually included.

California's Mentor Teacher Program, initiated in 1983, and originally conceived as the first rung on a Career Ladder is perhaps the most extensive of these programs. It provides an additional $4,000 per year in pay to individuals selected by a committee of their peers as mentors. More than 10,500 teachers in 958 California school districts participated as mentors in 1988-89. For the first five years of the program, the

focus of the mentors' work was on curriculum development. Recently, program emphasis has begun to shift as an increasing number of districts are turn-ing to mentors to provide professional support to their novice colleagues.

Shared Decision Making

Much of the effort to revamp the teaching profession has found a home within the broad categories of "shared governance" or "shared decision making" in which teachers are included as partners in significant educational decisions, such as curriculum, assignments, scheduling, and how classrooms and schools are organized. Widening teachers' "envelope of professional discretion" (Benveniste, 1988) is designed, at least in part, to provide teachers with a stake in their profession and a reason to remain in the classroom. The mechanisms by which teachers are included in decision making vary. Site-based management and trust agreements are examples of two visible mechanisms used by school districts to enhance shared decision making.

Site-based Management. In this organizational arrangement, significant educational decisions about matters such as budgeting, curriculum, and staffing devolve to the school site. These decisions, many of which were formerly reserved for the district's central office or made exclusively by the principal, are made by teams comprised of teachers, administrators, and sometimes parents.

The arguments for site-based management are two: 1) by including teachers in the decision-making process they become engaged and are no longer alienated and isolated from the context in which they work; and 2) by gaining control of their environment, teachers will presumably be able to create an atmosphere and conditions more conducive to learning and teaching.

Trust Agreements. Trust agreements enable teachers, as represented by their union, and school management to develop written agreements on professional issues which fall outside the scope of traditional collective bargaining or which appear better negotiated in this new collaborative setting. Trust agreements might be developed on a district-wide basis to ensure teacher participation in a wide range of decisions, or on a programmatic or school-level basis. At the programmatic or school level, the trust agreement formalizes teacher participation and requires teacher/administrator cooperation. At the district level, a trust agreement could broaden teacher influence beyond issues of compensation and working conditions to include larger educational issues.

The promise of trust agreements is two-fold: 1) the expertise and involvement of teachers will become a regular part of educational planning and implementation; and 2) the traditional antagonism between teachers and administrators might be replaced by more cooperative and "trusting" relations.

However, trust agreements are not a panacea. Not all teacher unions or administrators are ready to work together in a formal way whereby cooperation is necessary for joint decision making. Some teacher unions feel that this type of decision making is outside the scope of trade unionism. Others feel that it will divert attention from bread and butter issues which have yet to be adequately addressed. Administrators worry that teachers or their representatives will use their positions to reduce teacher work loads and increase compensation rather than improve education. The districts involved in trust agreement projects are working through these tensions in small, manageable chunks.

Changing the Organization of Schools

Some of the experiments in changing teacher work roles require fundamental alterations in the way educational services are delivered. Some of these are as seemingly simple as giving a team of teachers responsibility for a group of students, while others alter the school day, curriculum, and the way students learn.

Instructional Teams. Many middle schools are experimenting with an instructional team approach for adolescents. In this approach, a team of teachers becomes responsible for a group of students and all their "core" subjects. Typically, students stay together for a block of time for these core subjects and teachers share responsibility for administering the class and designing the curriculum. Many times, the team develops an integrated curriculum whereby a variety of traditional subjects are taught through a thematic focus.

Charter Schools. Under this concept, schools would be granted "charters" allowing them to explore educational innovations. Operating as schools-within-schools, charter schools would be established by teams of teachers "with visions of how to construct and implement more relevant educational programs or how to revitalize programs that had endured the test of time" (Budde, 1988). Charters would be granted by district governing boards, and each charter would be in force for a predetermined period of time. Ongoing assessment would be one of the requirements of maintaining the charter. At the charter's expiration, authority to continue the school program might be granted or the school might be disbanded and reconstituted.

The Team/Small Group Model. Several schools in Germany have employed a model of education that gives teachers broader responsibility for their students' instructional programs. Teams of six to eight teachers work with the same group of thirty students from grades five through ten. Teachers make all of the instructional decisions, including how the curriculum is taught, who teaches what, and the nature of their own professional development activities. They also serve

as mentors to new teachers and each other, and have the resources and authority at hand to secure assistance from colleagues in other social sectors, such as social workers and psychologists. Essentially, each team operates a school-within-a-school. This model is now being piloted on a limited basis in one Los Angeles high school.

Incorporating Multiple Reforms

While these three models can be discussed as discrete approaches to changing teacher work roles, districts and schools frequently incorporate multiple reforms at once. In addition to these reforms which give teachers more responsibility, schools are also concerned with other aspects of teachers' work that heighten job dissatisfaction and inhibit teacher performance. Rochester, New York, for example, is implementing a career ladder program, a peer assistance and review program, a site-based management plan, and the Home Base Guidance Program in which each middle or high school teacher serves as a case manager for 20 students, providing personal attention and the sympathetic ear of a caring adult. In addition to their site-based management plan, Dade County, Florida, also has developed the Dade Academy of Teaching Arts to provide teachers with nine week sabbaticals during which time they conduct research, serve as mentors, develop new instructional methods, and design curriculum materials.

Selecting a Reform Strategy

Although there is no one correct strategy or model of reform, there is little data evaluating the specific outcomes of any of the strategies. Do these reforms actually change the way teachers envision and approach their work? In the years ahead, these reforms and others likely to emerge, need to be evaluated carefully and thoughtfully with regard to their potential to improve schooling in the United States.

In the meantime, it is important to look at several aspects of reform that might influence policymakers to select one type of reform over another. Of critical importance is targeting the reform at what is considered the problem and at an area which is amenable to change (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Selecting a Reform Strategy

Factors Inhibiting Improved Teaching Performance	Reform Strategies
isolation	increase contact between teachers within the school and in the profession
powerlessness	include teachers in decision making
lack of information	improve staff development on effective practices, allow teachers to select and develop staff development programs, provide followup for teachers trying new practices, offer career development sabbaticals
lack of support	provide clerical aid, provide professional support through instructional, curriculum, or professional centers, provide breaks and planning time
inadequate rewards	increase compensation, include professional recognition activities, give teachers positive reinforcement
lack of career potential	develop optional career strategies that keep teachers in or close to the classroom while developing complementary skills
improved quality	raise standards for entering teachers, improve teacher training, link teacher recruiting and training more directly to skills and abilities of successful teachers
school organization	change the way schools are organized to give more consistent individual attention to students
teacher overload	reduce workload — teachers (especially in elementary grades) are expected to do too many things
	develop alternatives for concentrating expertise, sabbaticals

Since teachers' work is the focus of these reforms, it is important that teachers play a strong role in selecting and devising the reform strategy used. Despite schools' structural similarities, the needs of students and teachers and their ability or willingness to make certain changes varies widely. In order to succeed, reforms need to be adapted to the local context and remain flexible as local needs change.

Finally, some of these reform strategies have multiple effects. For example, developing a mentoring program can simultaneously create career options for experienced teachers, provide support, training, and collegiality for new and maturing teachers, and

improve the level of communication concerning effective practices. Shared decision making through site-based management has the potential for improving teachers' attitude, sense of engagement, and for contributing to the improvement of student performance.

Questions and Considerations

In addition to aiming the reform or set of reforms at the appropriate target and including those effected in the decision making, there are other considerations that need to be addressed. Not all teachers, much less all educators, agree about the future direction of teaching. Nor is it clear that society and the education profession have the will and stamina to implement reforms fully. Some of the questions that must be carefully thought out include:

- **How much authority and responsibility are teachers willing to accept?** Altering teachers' professional responsibilities requires that current teachers rethink the career they have chosen. The level of change and ambiguity that individuals can likely tolerate has an upper limit. Thus, efforts to restructure teachers' work may need to be phased-in over time.

- **What should be the role of principals?** In most conceptions of widening teachers' professional span of control, the principal is no longer viewed as the single instructional leader at the school. In some emerging cases, the principal becomes manager of the school implementing the decisions made by teachers. In other instances, the principal is the "leader of leaders," an integral member of a collaborative school team, but not the central member of that team. As the teaching profession changes, the role of the principal will continue to undergo substantial alteration. No clear pattern has yet emerged.

- **How might school labor relations be reconfigured?** Changing the role of teachers and expanding their discretion and control requires a change in the traditional adversarial relationship between teachers and administrators, since teachers will now participate in many traditional management functions. The historical focus on "bread and butter" issues of compensation and working conditions will also need to expand if unions are to participate fully in this reform effort.

Barriers to Change

Changing schools and the role of teachers is no simple task. While most educators — teachers and administrators — believe that schools must do better and improved performance will only come with change and innovation, there is little consensus on what the changes should be.

Bureaucratic inertia is a powerful force to overcome. Most changes are viewed with suspicion and a "wait and see" attitude. "Turf" threats to established professional roles create uncertainty, fear, and resistance among teachers and administrators. Moreover, there is a tendency among professional educators as well as the public to hearken back to the "good old days," to remember some idealized version of school while forgetting Will Rogers' observation that, "Schools are not as good as they used to be, but then they never were."

Policy Implications and Conclusion

What can and should state policymakers and local officials do in the area of changing teacher work roles? In many instances, the minimalist approach to policy specifics may be the wisest course of action. Crafting the architecture for redefining teacher work roles is not best accomplished by elaborate mandates for specific actions. **As we have learned from other change attempts, change is more easily accepted and more effective when it responds to local needs and is sensitive to the local context.** We do not yet know which of these policies will best improve teacher performance and improve student outcomes, nor in what contexts or combinations they will be most effective. Yet, because of widespread dissatisfaction with the outcomes of public education and the problem of attracting and retaining enough qualified teachers, we need to move ahead. The best policy may be an evolving one.

Legislative action can serve as a catalyst for expanding teacher work roles in several specific ways. Productive government responses might include:

- Preparing districts and schools for change. Policies should be designed to encourage districts or schools eager for change to move ahead and to prepare those who balk for future change.

- Providing a thorough analysis of reform strategies that matches options to needs and goals within the state or local context.

- Reducing regulations that serve as barriers to innovation.

- Providing financial incentives to programs that appear promising. More districts might be encouraged to engage in these experiments if start-up and implementation costs were provided.

- Offering consistent reinforcement to innovative programs, giving these experiments and the individuals involved in them "permission" to take risks.

- Helping to create networks that promote inter- as well as intra-school and district collaboration.

- Monitoring and evaluating programs for both intermediate and long-term effects on teacher satisfaction and performance, school effectiveness, and student outcomes.

Risks. There are two risks in attempting to redefine teacher work roles. One is that reforms will not address the depth of the problem sufficiently, that superficial changes will pass for reform and leave the institution unmoved. Reforms need to be monitored so that they result in increased effectiveness. Changing teacher work roles is not simply about making life more pleasant for teachers or about merely sharing power, but more importantly about improving education. States and districts need to keep a watchful eye that reforms do not get diverted from their goal.

The second risk is that reform efforts will cease prematurely, that policymakers, educators, and the public will become frustrated with the slow pace of change or allow the task of restructuring teaching to be eclipsed by some other issue. If it is true, however, that the crucial link in the education process is the relationship between teacher and student, then those who hope to restructure and reinvigorate schools must steer a steady course toward redefining the teaching career in ways that increase the effectiveness of teachers.

Altering the professional role of classroom teachers is neither a simple nor a cosmetic change. Redefining teachers' professional role must be viewed as one piece of a more comprehensive effort to restructure schools. In addition, there must be an acceptance by policymakers that lasting change cannot be accomplished "on the cheap," that investments in teachers as "human capital" will pay dividends but will likely require additional up-front infusions of dollars.

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